NTC/NCTCOG: City Manager and DART Leadership Working Group Outcomes for a Collaborative Path Forward

Overview

Over the course of four meetings from mid-September to October 2025, the City Manager Working Group—representing six of the 13 DART member cities—met to address concerns over governance, funding equity, and service delivery.

The purpose of this initiative was to identify actionable solutions that strengthen regional cooperation, restore confidence among member cities, and ensure DART's long-term sustainability as the largest regional transit provider.

Through a series of structured discussions, the working group achieved significant alignment on shared goals, established a framework for governance reform, proposed a new funding model exploration, and reaffirmed a collective commitment to maintaining and modernizing DART as a regional system.

Background

A majority of DART member cities have expressed increasing concern that the current governance, funding, and service structures do not adequately reflect evolving demographics, local investment levels, or the realities of urban mobility.

In response, the North Texas Commission and NCTCOG convened member city mayors and city managers on September 4th. From this meeting, a working group of six city managers and DART leadership was formed to:

- Clarify governance representation and accountability;
- Explore equitable funding approaches aligned with service value;
- Strengthen service planning collaboration; and
- Reinforce the regional commitment to multimodal transit access.

Summary of Achievements

Focus Area	Agreements Reached	Remaining Work
Governance	One City, One Vote baseline; population-weighted model; flexible, scalable structure.	Member city leadership approvals, DART board approval, and potential policy and legislative updates.
Funding	General support for rate study. Continued discussion re: proportionality, and regional premium model.	Define equity/fairness framework.
Service	Consensus on shared goals: connectivity, innovation, safety.	Refine through Area Plans and performance metrics.
Collaboration	Commitment to ongoing communication between DART and cities.	Implement transparent engagement process.
Area Plans	Confirmed as foundation for collaboration.	Validate city input and link to budget decisions.

Recommendations and Path Forward

- Reaffirm Regional Commitment: Preserve unity while improving flexibility and transparency.
- Proceed with the Rate Study: Identify cost of service by city and model a regional premium structure. This could include base regional premium supporting systemwide bus and rail operations, selectable inter-city services by city members, a general mobility program option.
- Adopt Shared Service Goals: Use shared goals as a foundation for accountability.
- Clarify and Standardize Area Plans: Link to strategic and budgetary decisions.
- Formalize Continuous Collaboration: Establish a City Manager/DART Liaison process- to be defined.
- Engage in Unified Communication: Present progress jointly to mayors and councils.

Conclusion

The City Manager Working Group has made significant strides in addressing concerns that have long divided DART member cities. Through these meetings, the group established common ground on governance, service, and the beginnings of a framework for equitable funding.

While work remains to define the specifics of equity and finalize the rate study, the progress achieved demonstrates a shared commitment to collaboration and solutions. The working group seeks to continue these discussions.

This report represents a unified step forward—a roadmap to a stronger, more adaptive, and regionally responsive DART system.

Summary of Meetings

Meeting 1 – September 18, 2025: Governance and Representation

Focus: Establishing the foundation for governance reform and shared goals.

- Consensus on Representation: Every member city should hold at least one seat and one full vote on the DART Board.
- Weighted Voting Framework: Support for adding votes or representation tiers based on population brackets.
- Board Size: Agreement on a manageable range of 19–23 members to ensure efficiency.
- Future-Proofing: Governance model should be flexible and scalable, allowing future cities to join without the need for new legislation.
- Shared Goals: Ensure exceptional, equitable, and accountable service; strengthen regional competitiveness; preserve DART's integrity.

Meeting 2 – October 2, 2025: Funding Equity and Shared Values

Focus: Aligning funding models with service delivery and refining governance principles.

- Funding Model: Agreement that DART's sustainability depends on proportional equity and regional benefit.
- New Funding Tools: Support for exploring local and regional revenue mechanisms.
- Legislative Framework: Desire for adaptable models without statutory overhaul.
- Performance Focus: Concern over light rail utilization; support for data-driven service decisions.

Meeting 3 – October 16, 2025: Service Proportionality, Area Plans, and Communication

Focus: Clarifying DART's Area Plans and advancing proportionality and equity discussions.

- Governance and Funding Goals: Agreement reached on all shared goals except equity/fairness definitions.
- Proportionality Principle: Service levels should reflect contributions while sustaining regional viability.
- Area Plans: Agreement to continue using Area Plans as collaboration tools pending process clarification.
- Communication Reform: Support for continuous collaboration rather than project-based engagement.
- Next Steps: DART to produce process map linking plans to budgeting and strategy.

Meeting 4 – October 24, 2025: Final Alignment on Shared Goals and Next Steps

Focus: Finalizing shared goals in Governance, Funding, and Service; establishing roadmap for citywide presentation.

- Governance: Reaffirmed previous agreements.
- Funding: Supported exploration of a "Regional Premium" model where contributions balance shared and local services.
- Rate Study: Agreement to conduct a rate study to test tiered models and cost structures. Points to consider include selectable services by municipality, general mobility funding, regional premium to support intra-city bus and rail operations.
- Service Design: Adopted shared goals for access, efficiency, reliability, innovation, and safety.
- Next Steps: Prepare unified presentation for November 13, focusing on collaboration and reform.

Shared Goals for DART Governance, Service, and Funding Models

As created by the DART leadership and city managers working group facilitated by NCTCOG and NTC.

As stakeholders of the North Texas region, we recognize that a strong and sustainable transit system is critical to economic competitiveness, workforce mobility, and quality of life. While each member city has unique needs and expectations, we affirm these shared values to guide discussions on governance, funding and service models. Each member city supports DART's success, and these principles provide a foundation for collaboration, transparency, and regional benefit as we consider the future of the DART system.

Governance Model Shared Goals [AGREEMENT REACHED]

- Stakeholders support DART's success- exceptional service, increased ridership, transit needed for economic development, regional economic competitiveness.
- Maintain equitable representation based on funding, population, employment, and ridership.
- Provide an effective, accountable, and durable structure for the next 5-20 years.
- Encourage growth and attract new members.
- No one city has a single majority vote. One City One Vote is the baseline for representation.
- Population updates should be considered every 5 years.

	Population 2025	Number of Seats with Proportionality	Vote Weight	Percentage of Vote
Addison	17,837	1	1	4%
Carrollton	136,543	1	1.5	6%
Cockrell Hill	3,855	1	1	4%
Dallas	1,385,989	5	10.5	40%
Farmers Branch	40,246	1	1	4%
Garland	251,932	2	2	8%
Glenn Heights	19,883	1	1	4%
Highland Park	8,793	1	1	4%
Irving	266,162	2	2	8%
Plano	299,262	2	2	8%
Richardson	122,745	1	1.5	6%
Rowlett	67,519	1	1	4%
University Park	25,574	1	1	4%
	2,646,340	20	26.5	

Service Model Shared Goals [AGREEMENT REACHED]

- Access & Connectivity – Service should ensure that residents across participating cities have access to reliable connections to jobs, education, health care, and regional destinations. Member cities understand that even if service levels vary by city, the system should function as an interconnected network that strengthens mobility across the entire DART region.
- Service Design – The service model should incorporate both fixed-route and flexible solutions (like on-demand micro transit) that adapt to different community densities and rider demand.
- Efficiency & Performance – Service levels should be based on measurable outcomes (ridership, coverage, cost-effectiveness) to maximize public benefit per dollar invested.
- Consistency & Reliability – Riders should experience predictable schedules, dependable frequency, and safe service regardless of city boundaries.
- Innovation & Adaptability – The model should encourage pilot programs, partnerships, and integration with new technologies (apps, mobility hubs, first/last mile solutions) to continually improve service.
- Regional Connectivity – Even if service levels vary by city, the system should function as an interconnected network that strengthens mobility across the entire DART region.
- Safety – Transit services must prioritize the physical safety and personal security of riders, employees, and the communities they serve. Member cities also support safety around transit stops and stations through design, infrastructure, and community partnerships. Together, these efforts reinforce trust and encourage ridership.

Funding Model Shared Goals [INPUT REQUIRED RE: EQUITY & FAIRNESS; ALL OTHERS AGREEMENT REACHED]

- **Equity & Fairness – Funding contributions should be proportionate to the level of service received, ensuring that each member city sees a clear and equitable return on investment. (REQUIRES FURTHER DISCUSSION)**
- Transparency & Accountability – All funding allocations, expenditures, and project and service prioritizations must be clear, auditable, and easily communicated to member cities and residents.
- Shared Responsibility & Regional Benefit – While individual cities expect local value and regional connectivity, the funding model should also recognize that transit investments contribute to the overall economic competitiveness and mobility of the greater North Texas region. As such, cities and regional stakeholders should actively collaborate and support new revenue options and regional policy that promotes regional equity and participation and allow for transit growth into new areas.
- Flexibility & Scalability – The funding approach should allow for adjustments as cities grow, transit needs evolve, and technology changes service delivery. DART and the member cities will work together through area plans to capture the changing needs of a city and advance opportunities to adjust service to meet the changing needs.
- Sustainability & Predictability – The model should provide a stable, long-term funding structure that supports planning and stability. DART, member cities, and other regional partners will work together to identify new funding sources that benefit both the transit authority and the members of transit authorities.